

Project SafeCom News and Updates

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1. David Stephens: Australia needs more feisty outspoken people like Yassmin Abdel-Magied

What better day than 25 April to raise important issues such as the fate of refugees in hell holes?

The Guardian

David Stephens

Thursday 27 April 2017 17.36 AEST

Yassmin Abdel-Magied's seven words have generated far more heat than they should have and very little light. "Lest. We. Forget." she said, "(Manus, Nauru, Syria, Palestine ...)" And off we went, on another Anzac Day witch-hunt, rather like the Scott McIntyre one two years ago, but this seemed to have a harder edge because Abdel-Magied was black, Muslim, noisy, a woman, and wore a hijab, where McIntyre was or did none of those things.

When you think about it, though, what better day than 25 April to raise important issues such as the fate of refugees in hell-holes? We are told that the men of Anzac a century ago – and servicemen and women since – were fighting to defend our values. So why not bring out some values along with the medals, some things we care deeply about? Abdel-Magied could have added: "Lest We Forget: domestic violence, child sexual abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, poverty, Indigenous disadvantage, frontier wars."

The backlash probably would have been just as strong had Abdel-Magied focused on these issues, because she would still have been seen as "hijacking" a "sacred" occasion. Many Australians' need for regular sentimental remembrance would still have trumped thinking about important matters in our present and future.

Anzac Day, like Christmas and Easter, is for some of us a day to put normal affairs to one side. On the other hand, it seemed to be OK for Barnaby Joyce and others to hijack the furore over Abdel-Magied to bash the ABC, and for readers of the Daily Telegraph and similar outlets to have a whack at Muslims – some of the comments on Andrew Bolt's blog were breathtaking in their crudity and brutality – or let fly with that great Australian riposte "piss off back to where you came from."

People involved with the Honest History project have long hoped that the current obsession with Anzac would be the last gasp of a white male Anglo-Celtic Australia. Maybe not. It has been interesting to see how many of those screeching at Abdel-Magied have been women, some of them doing it rather nastily, like Lisa Oldfield on Sky News.

But the Anglo-Celt Anzackers – Anzackery is the extreme form of the Anzac secular religion – have also been trying hard to recruit recent arrivals, including Muslims, to the received view of Anzac. Andrew Bolt approved of flag-waving Muslims at this year's marches, and a schools booklet from the Department of Veterans' Affairs included Samir, a refugee from Sudan, feeling obliged to get his head around Anzac.

Prime minister Gillard's office, planning for the Anzac centenary, called for a second focus group report when the first threw up some concerns about multicultural attitudes to Anzac. The second report assuaged concerns, with the inclusion of responses from people with Muslim-sounding names. Gwenda Tavan writes in *The Honest History Book* that in our still Anglo-Celtic dominated Australia "the best marker of immigrants' success is their capacity to become invisible, through absorption into the national community." Signing up to the traditional version of Anzac is part of the deal.

If Abdel-Magied preferred not to become a card-carrying Anzacker – or even an invisible honorary Anglo-Celt – should she just have pulled her head in for a while? This is known to people who have served in the Australian Defence Force as "showing situational awareness" and critics of received views get hit with it a lot.

The trouble is that situational awareness usually comes without a time limit. How long would Abdel-Magied be required to keep mum? A week? A month? Longer? "Lest We Forget" is one of those "icons," like the flag or the national anthem, which evoke particular emotions at any time. The demand for situational awareness soon slops over into lasting censorship and suppression.

It's a shame that Abdel-Magied withdrew her remarks and apologised. We need more feisty, outspoken people like her, not fewer. The families of soldiers who died in the Great War first world war received from a grateful King George V a medallion (known as "the King's Penny" or "the Dead Man's Penny") which carried the words, "He Died for Freedom and Honour." In Australia, 100 years on, that freedom should include the freedom to have – and express – awkward views.

David Stephens is secretary of the Honest History coalition, editor of its website and a co-editor with Alison Broinowski of *The Honest History Book*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/27/australia-needs-more-feisty-outspoken-people-like-yassmin-abdel-magied>

2. David Speers calls for less secrecy on defence and asylum seekers

Sky News political editor bemoans that 'we found out through US media' Australian troops were in a chemical attack in Mosul

The Guardian

Amanda Meade

Friday 28 April 2017 22.09 AEST

Australian governments should be less secretive about defence matters, asylum seekers and political donations and expenses, Sky News political editor David Speers has said in his address to the Press Freedom Australia dinner on Friday night.

"In August 2014 Australian troops were sent back into Iraq to help in the fight against Islamic State," Speers said. "Apart from an initial flurry of coverage when they were first deployed, we now hear very little."

Speaking in Sydney at the fundraiser for journalists in conflict zones, Speers said one of the greatest challenges for Australian political journalism is the lack of transparency and our complacency about it.

"Early last week Australian troops were caught up in a chemical weapons attack by Islamic State in Mosul," he said.

"We found out initially through the American media! Fortunately no Australians were hurt. But why aren't we told about this? There's a hell of a fight going on in Mosul and we haven't had one briefing about it."

Speers said the defence department pumped out press releases and handed out glossy photographs but refused to give journalists access to the troops.

The lack of media access to Manus and Nauru made it extremely difficult to determine the truth, he said, pointing to the recent incident when PNG defence personnel fired around 100 shots into the Manus Island detention centre.

"Now if we did have more media access I'm not suggesting we'd all have permanent correspondents based in Manus Island.

"But when a situation like this comes along, where asylum seekers claim there's an unfair insinuation that paedophilia is going on and when there are fears about what this could do to an already volatile situation between some locals and the asylum seekers, surely allowing journalists in to talk to all sides and accurately report what's gone on would only be a good thing."

The Sky News presenter, whose team won a silver Logie on Sunday for the best news coverage, was the keynote speaker at the Walkley Foundation event in collaboration with the International Federation of Journalists and the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance.

There was not much concern about "fake news" in Australia, he said, but he did think it was crucial journalists disputed politicians who labelled uncomfortable news stories as fake news.

"There is absolutely no justification to link entirely legitimate stories from reputable journalists to the crap from fraudsters in Macedonia and other peddlers of material designed to deliberately mislead and undermine how people are informed," Speers said.

"If a competitor's legitimate story is labeled fake by a self-serving politician, call it out. Don't let trashing journalism become a go-to response for those politicians who can't mount a better defence."

Speers said transparency and strong, balanced journalism was more important than ever because the public was losing trust in the media, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer which showed trust in the media in Australia fell an alarming 10 points during 2016, from 42% to just 32%.

"That's near the bottom of the pack internationally," he said. "Well below the level of trust in the media in the US, India, China and Indonesia. We scrape in just above Russia and Turkey.

"Without trust we are vulnerable. Who are voters going to believe when a politician labels as fake a story they simply don't like?"

Social media storms and Twitter abuse made it difficult to play it straight but journalists should go back to basics and hold both sides to account, he said.

"To ask tough questions of those in every political party, the big ones and the little ones, to uncover uncomfortable truths and, yes, tell audiences what they might not like to hear or necessarily agree with," he said.

"Journalists need to be journalists, not players. Not Twitter warriors.

"If you want to be trusted as a political journalist, play it straight. If your media organisation values trust, they will thank you for it. Don't be swayed by the outrage industry on social media.

"Admittedly this isn't as easy as it sounds," he said.

Held at the Ivy ballroom this year, the annual dinner raises money for the Media Safety and Solidarity Fund, which provides support for journalists in conflict zones in the Asia-Pacific, as well as emergency assistance in times of disaster.

According to the fund, 28 journalists were killed last year in the Asia-Pacific alone, and 93 worldwide.

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/apr/28/david-speers-calls-for-less-secrecy-on-defence-and-asylum-seekers>

3. Ian Verrender: Immigrants advance Australian economy, but what happens if we 'close the door?'

ABC News Online
By business editor Ian Verrender
Monday April 25, 2017

For a nation built mostly on newly-arrived immigrants, it's an issue guaranteed to inflame heated and at times vicious debate.

Outright distrust and opposition to anything "foreign" was part of our social fabric until 70 years ago, and at one stage was enshrined in our political system via The White Australia policy.

Then, the post war immigration boom saw waves of European refugees flee their war-torn homelands in search of a better life.

Those new arrivals changed Australia forever, overwhelmingly for the better, as did the influx of Asian immigrants fleeing conflict in the 1970s.

But despite the proclamations from our leaders that we are a tolerant mob who embrace cultural diversity, the deep-seated distrust among established Australians never really evaporated, as evidenced by the animosity towards new arrivals from the Middle East.

So inflamed are passions, it is nigh on impossible to have a sensible debate over levels of immigration whether it be in regards to the continent's environmental sensitivities or on the impact on the economy.

Those who raise legitimate concerns often are accused of racism.

That's understandable given environmental protection and the economy have become convenient smokescreens for those who harbour deep prejudices.

Aussie, Aussie, Aussie and GDP gold

Sometime in the next few weeks, there will be jubilation in the halls of Canberra when Australia assumes the world record for the nation that has stayed out of recession the longest.

The March quarter GDP numbers are expected to show 104 quarters without a recession, besting current record holders at 103, the Netherlands.

If you ask our political masters, they'll invariably declare that most of it was down to sound economic management, an independent central bank that made the correct calls at the crucial times, and a flexible economy that can handle the ebb and flow of global tides through a free floating currency.

That's all true, to a certain extent.

But a fundamental ingredient in that economic miracle has been immigration and more particularly the extent to which the program has been ramped up in the past 15 years.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-24/verrender-immigration-and-the-economic-illusion/8465428>

4. Dengue fever outbreak in Nauru hits 10 per cent of asylum seekers

Canberra Times
April 27 2017
Michael Koziol

A Dengue fever outbreak ravaging the island nation of Nauru has now hit about 10 per cent of asylum seekers living at the Australian-run regional processing centre.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection confirmed 41 people living at the facility had contracted the mosquito-borne viral disease by the end of March.

That number is likely to have risen as health authorities struggle to contain an outbreak that is estimated to have affected up to 900 people on the island of 10,000.

But authorities, including Australia's immigration department, are refusing to detail the extent of the crisis or what strategies have been put in place to combat it.

In mid-March, contractor International Health and Medical Services told a Senate inquiry there had been 34 cases at the detention centre's clinic, including 29 refugees and asylum seekers and five staff.

"This is, I believe, the most severe outbreak that they have had since the 1970s," Peter Rudolph, area medical director with IHMS, told the inquiry.

There are 373 refugees or asylum seekers living at the centre. The number of confirmed Dengue cases had risen to at least 41 by March 27, according to official department advice released on April 21.

But on Thursday the department declined to say whether the number had since increased, or how many of affected individuals were women and children, saying it was a matter for the government of Nauru.

The total number of refugees and asylum seekers with Dengue fever on the island is likely to be much higher, because the majority of refugees now live outside the detention facility in the Nauruan community.

IHMS said it does not know how the number of cases handled by the local hospital, but Dr Rudolph told the inquiry: "We assume it is far greater than the numbers that we have dealt with."

This is not the first time an outbreak of Dengue fever has hit the tiny equatorial country, but it is far worse than an episode in 2014 when three asylum seekers were reported to have been affected.

The disease generally lasts a week but can be fatal. As well as fever, it can affect the body's major organs, leading to inflammation in the brain and liver - while the depletion of platelets in the blood can lead to spontaneous internal bleeding.

"That can be a very serious situation," Dr Rudolph told the inquiry. "It can kill people."

The immigration department also confirmed four people had been medically evacuated to Australia as a result of their condition. Greens senator Nick McKim said that indicated circumstances on the island were dire.

"If they're transferring to Australia, then they're really sick," he said. "We're clearly exposing people to unsafe conditions."

In a statement, the department said it was aware of "some residual cases" of Dengue fever in Nauru, "with diagnosed cases within the transferee and refugee community and service provider staff".

"Appropriate treatment is being provided," a spokesman said. "There is a comprehensive mosquito control program in place at the regional processing centre."

A crisis meeting was reportedly held between the Australian Border Force, IHMS and the Nauruan government in February, but the department declined to comment on the outcome of the talks.

The department also declined to answer questions about the status of people who had been transferred to Australia. IHMS referred all questions to the immigration department.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/dengue-fever-outbreak-in-nauru-hits-10-per-cent-of-asylum-seekers-20170427-gvtk2u.html>

5. Australia labelled 'rogue state' for Manus deportations

Radio NZ

Pacific - Papua New Guinea

Wednesday April 26, 2017 - 4:21 pm

Australia has been labelled 'a rogue state' by lawyers troubled by the pending deportation of a Manus Island asylum seeker from Papua New Guinea.

Azzam el Sheikh committed self-harm to avoid previous attempts to send him back to Lebanon, where he claims his life and his family will be in danger if he returns.

Exactly one year since the PNG Supreme court ruled the detention of asylum seekers was unconstitutional, on 26 April, Mr El Sheikh, could be deported, according to refugee advocates.

A spokesman for the Australian Lawyers Alliance the barrister, Greg Barns, said by deporting him Australia would be breaking international law and committing what is known as refoulement.

"Australia has an obligation under the United Nations conventions in relation to refugees, not to return a person to a situation where they may be tortured or subjected to cruel and unusual punishment or face the risk of death," said Mr Barns.

"There have been quite a number of people that the Australian government has forcibly deported who've either been killed on return to Afghanistan or been detained and subjected to torture," he said.

"When a person is extremely unwell, as Azzam is ... and is clearly not in a fit mental or physical state to travel, then it's certainly in breach of Australia's obligations to force a person in those circumstances onto a plane."

The Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection said the government of PNG had decided asylum seekers found not to be refugees must depart.

But Mr Barns said the refugee determination process on Manus Island was deeply flawed.

He said a recent report by the Australian Senate supported his conclusion that the decision to deport Mr el Sheikh was Australia's.

"The Australian government has been beastly careless for a number of years now, about the rights of individuals it deports," said Mr Barns.

"It's yet another example of how Australia for the last two decades has become a rogue state when it comes to the treatment of refugees and when it comes to the treatment of asylum seekers and deportation."

The first two attempts to move Mr El Sheikh from Manus to Port Moresby were thwarted by the asylum seeker's physical resistance and acts of self harm.

Badly injured, Mr El Sheikh was tossed into a police cell where he went on hunger strike and appealed for clemency from the Australian government on Youtube.

The Refugee Action Collective's, Margaret Sinclair, said Mr El Sheikh was in no condition to resist the third attempt.

"There was maybe a couple of dozen different security forces escorting Azzam onto the plane and by that stage because he had 12 days of hunger strike and a number of injuries he couldn't make any resistance," said Ms Sinclair.

"It's a very strange thing to have people in jail when they haven't been charged with any offences. That was actually the basis of the Papua New Guinea court decision. Detaining people in a jail without charge contravenes the constitution of Papua New Guinea."

Ms Sinclair said Mr El Sheikh had been in Port Moresby's Bomana prison since 11 April and had not been given access to a lawyer or treatment for a suspected broken ankle and broken ribs.

She said it would be unethical for any airline to transport Mr el Sheikh out of Papua New Guinea.

The Manus Island detainee, Naji, had been in contact with Mr El Sheikh and said his friend had been left in prison to rot.

"His health is getting worse and especially his foot. He hasn't got any medicine yet and still without showering and in the same clothing since they took him from here," said Naji.

"The doctor in the prison said he needs hospital and I think a couple of days ago the Red Cross visited him and they wanted to take him to hospital but they couldn't," he said.

"He doesn't need any money ... he just asked to get protection ... All I can say about Azzam is he will be in danger if they send him back by force."

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/329471/australia-labelled-'rogue-state'-for-manus-deportations>

6. Katie Robertson: Children are being damaged in detention. Australia's day of reckoning will come

In the tangle of debate about asylum seekers some things are simple. There is no excuse for damaging children in our care

The Guardian
Katie Robertson
Thursday 27 April 2017 13.55 AEST

It's been just over three years since I met her for the first time on a frantic visit to Christmas Island. Given just a small window of time by the department of immigration to see her family among many suffering under the conditions of their detention, we'd crammed into a small airless room, guards ever-present at the door.

On my second visit a few months later she spotted me as soon as I was buzzed through the second set of heavy iron security gates and came running along the enclosed concrete path, wrapping her arms around my legs and refusing to let go. She was small for her age of six – too small – and she had dark rings under her eyes. She wasn't eating or sleeping well, her father explained. Over a year in detention with the daily threat of removal to Nauru was taking its toll, most obviously on this little girl.

This child was one of many to experience unnecessary and serious harm at the hands of the Australian government while held in immigration detention. This week we reached a settlement with the government for the damage we say this little girl suffered during her time locked up on the island.

Our case alleged that she suffered physical and mental harm as a result of poor medical treatment, including an excruciating dental infection that was left untreated for months and a range of regressive behavioural symptoms that contributed to a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder. Our case also alleged that she was unable to attend school at a crucial stage of her development, faced instead with the monotony of life in detention on Christmas Island – no space to play, in an environment of adults and children rapidly spiralling into desperate states of depression and mental illness.

While nothing can undo the terrible treatment she suffered, hopefully resolution of her case can provide some measure of justice that allows her and her family to move forward with their lives in Australia. It is also no doubt a relief for the Australian government, which once again will avoid having the conditions of detention on this remote island and the appalling lack of medical treatment available to children exposed in open court. Detaining people in remote locations such as Christmas Island and Nauru – away from lawyers, journalists and the public eye – is central to the operation of this harsh border policy.

It's been a tough case – the government have thrown everything they have at fighting this young, damaged child. She is the living product of Australia's tough stance on refugees. And she, like so many, will have to live with the experience for the rest of her life.

The Australian government will one day be forced to acknowledge and apologise for the consequences of what our country has done to children in detention and so many innocent people seeking protection from persecution on our shores. When that day of reckoning comes, there will be no way of denying we knew what was happening behind the wire and how bad it was. We know. And we make choices every day to either fight against it and shine a light on this abusive treatment or stick our heads in the sand and allow this state-sanctioned trauma to continue.

There's no denying the issue of refugees in this country is fraught, complex and hotly debated. But within the tangle of competing arguments some things are simple. There is no excuse for damaging children in our care. There is a right and wrong side to this debate when it comes to the littlest ones we hurt. And no amount of policy rhetoric spouted by politicians, blandly followed by departmental staff under the guise of "just doing their job" and aggressively defended by government lawyers will be justified when we look back on this shameful chapter in Australia's history in years to come.

Katie Robertson is an associate at Maurice Blackburn Lawyers.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/27/children-are-damaged-in-detention-australias-day-of-reckoning-will-come>

7. Iranian child asylum seeker wins payout over detention on Christmas Island

ABC News Online
By Emma Younger
Wednesday April 26, 2017

The Federal Government has agreed to pay a confidential settlement to a nine-year-old Iranian asylum seeker over her detention on Christmas Island.

Lawyers for the girl, who was five at the time she was detained, alleged she received inadequate care on Christmas Island where she was held for 13 months in 2013 and 2014.

It was argued the girl developed post-traumatic stress disorder, a recurrent dental infection, a stammer, separation anxiety and major depression.

The settlement between her lawyers and the Federal Government was approved by the Victorian Supreme Court ahead of an eight-week trial which was due to start today.

The terms of the settlement will remain confidential.

In a statement, a spokesperson from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said the Commonwealth does not admit liability.

"As this matter is still before the court in relation to some outstanding issues, it would not be appropriate for the department to comment further," it said.

The girl, who cannot be identified, arrived on Christmas Island by boat with her family and now lives in Australia on a temporary bridging visa.

Her litigation guardian, Sister Brigid Arthur, said the girl's family was relieved the case had settled.

"While it's an effort to get justice it's also an extra trauma for them and an extra thing that they were waiting for a response to," she said.

"Families in this situation just have an ongoing waiting, waiting, waiting."

The case was initially launched as a class action on behalf of other asylum seekers who said they also suffered injury while being detained on the island.

About 35,000 people were held in offshore detention centres on Christmas Island in the period covered by the class action claim, between August 2011 and August 2014.

Asylum seekers urged to make claims

But the court earlier ruled the case should proceed as an individual claim only because claims made by the class action group members were too different.

Lawyer Thomas Ballantyne from Maurice Blackburn said despite the court refusing to hear the case as a class action, asylum seekers should be encouraged to make individual claims for compensation.

"This case really will have made subsequent cases a lot easier," he said.

"It's really important too that this litigation continues to shine a light on what happened on Christmas Island.

"So in that respect we'd also be hopeful that more people come forward."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-26/iranian-asylum-seeker-wins-payout-detention-christmas-island/8472718>

8. Child asylum seeker wins government payout over Christmas Island detention trauma

Immigration department offers confidential settlement to nine-year-old girl who claims her physical and mental health deteriorated in her 12 months on the island

The Guardian

Calla Wahlquist

Wednesday 26 April 2017 13.37 AEST

A nine-year-old girl who was held in Christmas Island detention has been awarded a settlement by the immigration department over claims her physical and mental health deteriorated in her 12 months on the island.

The girl, known as A.S, was five years old when she arrived in Australia on 26 July 2013 and was placed in the Christmas Island detention centre, along with her father and pregnant mother.

She suffered recurrent dental abscesses and recurrent allergic reactions while in detention on Christmas Island and was also diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression with anxiety, separation anxiety, stuttering and bed-wetting.

The case was the backbone of a class action by law firm Maurice Blackburn about the negligent treatment of asylum seekers at the Christmas Island detention centre, but the class action was disbanded by the supreme court in Victoria last month after judge Jack Forrest ruled the cases in the class action lacked commonality.

The individual claim by A.S. was then scheduled for a six-week trial before the immigration department offered a settlement, on the grounds that the amount of the settlement be kept confidential.

The offer was finalised before Judge Forrest in the supreme court in Melbourne on Wednesday.

Tom Ballantyne, senior medical negligence lawyer for Maurice Blackburn in Melbourne, said achieving a settlement would make any subsequent claims by Christmas Island detainees "much easier."

Ballantyne told journalists outside court that the girl and her family were satisfied with the outcome.

"Look, there's never any amount of compensation that can properly recognise what the lead plaintiff has gone through and what other people have gone through on Christmas Island," he said. "I can say that they're satisfied and quite relieved that it's over."

According to facts contained in the statement of claim filed in September 2016, A.S. was held in detention on Christmas Island with her mother and father for two weeks after arriving in Australia, before her mother was transferred to a detention centre in Darwin.

Following that separation, A.S. developed anxiety and began stuttering and wetting the bed.

She and her father were transferred to Darwin to join her mother a week later and were then approved for community detention, but they were never released into the community and were instead transferred back to Christmas Island detention centre in October 2013, after her younger brother was born.

The family was moved to another detention centre on 19 August 2014, one week before Maurice Blackburn filed the original writ for a class action, and A.S. was released into the community after being granted a bridging visa in January 2015.

Maurice Blackburn argued that the minister for immigration, the Australian government and Serco had failed in their duty of care to A.S. in failing to take reasonable care to ensure detention did not cause or exacerbate any injury to her; failing to ensure she attended school; and failing to ensure that as a minor she was only detained as an option of last resort.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection disputed those allegations.

Sister Brigid Arthur from the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project, who was acting as litigation guardian for A.S., said A.S. and her family were "very relieved to have it behind them."

She said that while it was in the pursuit of justice, the court process itself had been re-traumatising.

"I am very happy for the family's sake that this is over and I'm also very happy that such actions can still happen in Australia and that the whole issue of detention is being subject to the law and I hope that that continues," Arthur said.

The family are still living in the community on bridging visas and their refugee status has not been determined.

Arthur said being held in immigration detention was inherently traumatising and no amount of improving conditions in detention could fully remove that trauma.

“All people who have been in detention are traumatised, and in particular children because the parents are anxious about the children and that trickles through to how the kids then feel,” she said. “Sometimes they feel guilty that they actually in some way caused the problems, it’s amazing what the kids will think. So detention has long-term deleterious affects on families.”

In 2015, the department was ordered to pay \$10,000 in costs to lawyers from Maurice Blackburn for blocking access to certain units at the Christmas Island detention centre, after the Victorian supreme court had granted them unprecedented access to the centre for the purpose of the case.

The class action purported to include more than 35,000 people who were held in detention on Christmas Island between August 2011 and August 2014. Those claims will now have to be pursued individually.

The trial for a separate class action against the Australian government, G4S and Transfield Services over treatment of detainees at the Manus Island detention centre is due to start at the supreme court in Melbourne on 15 May.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/26/child-asylum-seeker-wins-government-payout-over-christmas-island-detention-trauma>

9. US will honour refugee deal with Australia, Vice-President Mike Pence confirms

Canberra Times
April 22 2017
Amy Remeikis

US Vice-President Mike Pence has reaffirmed that the Trump administration will honour the controversial refugee deal struck with Barack Obama, despite not liking it.

Made in the last days of the Obama administration, the United States agreed to resettle refugees from Manus Island and Nauru, as Australia seeks to close its off-shore detention facilities.

In a phone call to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull shortly after his election, President Donald Trump referred to it as the "worst deal ever" in a conversation later described as "tense".

Speaking to media following his bilateral meeting with Mr Turnbull in Sydney on Saturday, Mr Pence said the deal would go ahead, despite doubts over what Mr Trump had publicly labelled a "dumb" agreement.

"President Trump has made it clear we will honour the agreement, but it doesn't mean we admire the agreement," he said.

"Frankly looking back at the last administration, the President has never been shy about expressing frustration with other international agreements, most notably the so-called nuclear agreement with Iran.

"Rest assured, as I confirmed today with the Prime Minister, the United States of America will honour the agreement and actually we have initiated the process of fulfilling that agreement, subject to the vetting processes that now apply to all refugees in the United States."

Mr Pence also appeared to confirm Mr Turnbull's role in ensuring the deal would still go ahead under a Trump administration, which was pinpointed as the cause of the now-notorious phone call. "As this topic came up early in this administration, Prime Minister Turnbull made the case for the agreement with the President and the decision to go forward, I think, can rightly be seen as a reflection of the enormous importance of the historical alliance between the United States and Australia," Mr Pence said.

"And whatever reservations the President may have about the details of agreements reached with the prior administration, we will honour this agreement out of respect for that enormously important alliance."

Neither Mr Pence nor Mr Turnbull would say how many refugees would be resettled, under the agreement. US Homeland Security officials have travelled to Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea to begin interviews with those who have applied under the deal.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton was recently criticised for claiming fears over a five-year-old local boy, who was allegedly led into the Manus Island detention centre, sparked a recent violent outburst at the facility, an account which has been disputed by PNG officials. The Manus Island facility has been marked for closure in the second half of this year, after the PNG Supreme Court found it to be unconstitutional.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/us-will-honour-refugee-deal-with-australia-vice-president-mike-pence-confirms-20170422-gvq889.html>

10. 'I have facts you don't': Immigration minister Peter Dutton stands by Manus claims in fiery interview

Canberra Times
April 23 2017 - 10:52AM
Adam Gartrell

Peter Dutton is standing by his claims about what sparked a rampage on Manus Island, dismissing alternative accounts as "the Twitter version".

In a fiery interview on ABC television on Sunday, the Immigration Minister declared "there are facts that I have that you don't" as he refused to resile from his assertions that appeared to blame asylum seekers for last week's violent outburst.

Mr Dutton last week said the Good Friday confrontation came after asylum seekers were spotted leading a five-year-old Papua New Guinean boy into the Australian-run detention centre. The incident caused "a lot of angst" and the mood escalated quickly, he said. PNG police and soldiers fired up to 100 gunshots during the subsequent brawl.

But Mr Dutton's account has been disputed by authorities on the ground, including the Manus Province police commander David Yapu, who said the incident with the child actually occurred a week earlier and had nothing to do with the violence.

The boy - aged 10 not five as claimed by Mr Dutton - was taken into the centre, given some fruit and then escorted out by security. He was returned to his parents unharmed, Mr Yapu said.

But Mr Dutton on Sunday insisted the incident with the child - along with a separate sexual assault - had contributed to a volatile mood on the island. He said he had not been trying to apportion blame but simply to explain why the tensions had boiled over.

"I can give you the facts in relation to it or you can take the Twitter version," he said.

"I was asked why the mood had elevated on the ground on Manus Island. The two incidents fed directly into that. That is indisputable."

Police were investigating the incident involving the child, he said.

"I think that there are facts that I have that you don't so why don't we let the police investigation run its course and allow them some independent analysis ... The parents of the boy involved in the incident might have a different view to the one that you have read off tweets."

Mr Dutton said he had taken advice with senior people on the ground, including the island's governor.

PNG Defence Force chief of staff Raymond Numa, whose soldiers were accused by police of drunken violence in the Good Friday brawl, also said he was not aware of the involvement of a child. Refugees at the facility also denied any link.

The Greens have likened Mr Dutton's claims to "children overboard" - a reference to false claims from the Howard government that asylum seekers threw their children off leaky boats to prompt a rescue.

Tensions are high on Manus after a 28-year-old Pakistani refugee was arrested and charged last month for the alleged sexual assault of a 10-year-old girl in Lorengau.

It was the second sexual assault charge brought against an asylum seeker on Manus Island this year. None have been proven, and both have been contested.

The centre is slated for closure in the latter half of this year after being found unconstitutional by the PNG Supreme Court.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/i-have-facts-you-dont-immigration-minister-peter-dutton-stands-by-manus-claims-in-fiery-interview-20170422-gvqhxd.html>

11. Peter Dutton defends comments over 'five-year-old' boy and Manus shooting incident

ABC News Online
By political reporter Henry Belot
Sunday April 23, 2017

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton says it is "indisputable" that concerns for the safety of a young boy were directly related to a shooting on the Manus Island detention centre.

Mr Dutton said earlier this week that Papua New Guinea soldiers fired bullets into the centre after reports a five-year-old had been led into the detention centre. He suggested local residents and soldiers feared the boy had been sexually assaulted inside the detention centre. But Manus province police commander David Yapu said the incident involving the boy — who he said was 10 years old — was unrelated and there was no concern for his safety.

Mr Dutton stood by his comments on Insiders on Sunday morning, saying he had received "succinct and clear" briefings from officials on the island. "The point that I was making and certainly the clear advice I received was that there had been a ramping up in terms of the mood on the ground over a period of time," he said. Mr Dutton confirmed two people had been accused of sexual assault but said the matter would be dealt with by the PNG courts. "Of course it is true," Mr Dutton told Insiders.

"I was asked why the mood was elevated on the ground on Manus Island and these two incidents fed directly into that — that is indisputable. If you are asking me about why there was an elevation in the angst between those that are living on the naval base on Manus Island, this was part of it, and that was the clear advice to me."

Mr Yapu said the boy was brought into the centre to be given food some days before the attack by the soldiers. "He was given some fruit by the residents in the centre and then he was taken out again," he said. "So there was nothing done to him and also there was no official complaint by the parents of that small boy."

Dutton says decision on CCTV footage is down to PNG government

Asylum seekers in the centre said the boy was begging for food at the centre entrance and that staff were aware that he was brought inside to be fed. They have urged the Australian Government to release CCTV footage from the many cameras at the centre, saying it will show their account was correct.

Mr Dutton would not commit to releasing the footage but said any decision to do so would be made by the PNG Government. "We will continue to release footage as is the normal practice now, I am not making an exception one way or the other in relation to this case," he said. "If it is appropriate for it and that has been the practice in the past, then that will happen, but that is a matter for the PNG Government."

Mr Dutton would not comment on contradicting reports from the PNG police, including the age of the boy, saying the matters would be resolved by a police investigation. "Shots being fired or behaviour as it is reported is completely unacceptable and it should be investigated," he said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-23/dutton-sticks-by-manus-shooting-account/8464994>

12. Peter Dutton sticks to account of Manus Island trouble despite fresh evidence

Detainees and local police chief David Yapu say immigration minister is conflating two entirely different events

The Guardian
Katharine Murphy Political editor
Sunday 23 April 2017 02.59 BST

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has dug in behind his account of the origins of a disturbance on Manus Island despite his account being directly contradicted by detainees and the local top police officer, David Yapu.

Dutton told the ABC on Sunday morning he stood by his own account of the incident, where he suggested a shooting occurred after local people witnessed asylum seekers leading a five-year-old boy towards the centre.

The minister said the account he had given of the incident was "true" and he suggested he had different advice to the Manus Island regional police commander.

Dutton said he was in possession of advice "that you don't [have], so why don't we let the police investigation run its course and allow them some independent analysis".

Yapu told Guardian Australia last Friday the events leading up to the shooting on Manus, where armed men stormed the compound, and the incident involving the child, were entirely separate incidents.

"It's a total separate incident altogether," Yapu said. "The incident that transpired on Friday was because a duty soldier was being assaulted by one of the asylum seekers or refugees."

Yapu said a young boy had gone to the centre to ask for food about two weeks ago, but he was not led there and was 10, not five, as Dutton had suggested. He said the boy's parents had not made a complaint, and police were not investigating any link between his visit and the shooting.

Last week Dutton told Sky News: “I think there was concern about why the boy was being led, or for what purpose he was being led, away back into the regional processing centre. I think it’s fair to say that the mood had elevated quite quickly. I think some of the local residents were quite angry about this particular incident and another alleged sexual assault,” he said.

Dutton was asked on Sunday whether, given the police chief’s account, he now accepted he had got some of the information he shared last week badly wrong.

“No, I do not,” the immigration minister said.

Dutton insisted on Sunday the incident involving the child, and a separate sexual assault, contributed to elevating the “mood” on Manus Island before the violence. “I have that on very good authority on the island,” he said. “The parents of the boy involved in the incident might have a different view to the one that you have read off tweets.”

Dutton said his comments last week on Sky News “didn’t put any blame anywhere”.

“I was asked a question as to why the mood was elevated, I’ve answered that question honestly and on advice.”

Detainees on Manus Island have also disputed Dutton’s version of events, and there have been calls for the government to release CCTV footage of the incident involving the child.

Dutton was asked on Sunday whether he would release the footage, and he said the normal practice would be followed. “We will continue to release footage as is the normal practice now,” he said.

“I’m not making an exception one way or the other in relation to this case. If it is appropriate for it, and that’s been the practice in the past, then that will happen.

“But that is an issue for the PNG government. They run Manus Island, as you know.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/23/peter-dutton-sticks-to-account-of-manus-island-trouble-despite-fresh-evidence>

13. Labor demands Peter Dutton apologise for ‘outrageous’ comments on Manus violence

Immigration minister linked incident involving armed men storming detention centre with separate incident involving a child, despite contrary evidence

The Guardian
Katharine Murphy Political editor
Sunday 23 April 2017 21.00 BST

Labor is demanding that the immigration minister Peter Dutton apologise for “irresponsible and outrageous” commentary about the origins of a violent disturbance on Manus Island.

The shadow immigration minister Shayne Neumann told Guardian Australia Dutton needed to apologise for linking an incident when armed men stormed the compound, and a separate incident involving a child – an account which has been contradicted by detainees on Manus Island and by the local top police officer, David Yapu.

Dutton dug in behind his controversial comments on Sunday, despite the comprehensive rebuttal from people on the ground.

“Peter Dutton’s comments are irresponsible and outrageous,” Neumann said. “They preempt the findings of a PNG investigation and have been denied by authorities on the ground. Peter Dutton should know better and immediately apologise.”

Neumann called on the Turnbull government to be upfront about the violent incident on Manus Island, saying the “culture of secrecy must change”.

“Labor supports a full investigation into how this incident began, who is responsible and how authorities responded,” he said. “The Australian and PNG governments must work together to ensure the safety of asylum seekers and staff living or working in Australian-funded offshore processing centres.

“People who seek asylum have a right to have their claims processed in safety and in a timely way. It appears the government is now failing on both these fronts.”

Dutton used an appearance on the ABC on Sunday to stand by his version of events. He said he was he was in possession of advice “that you don’t [have], so why don’t we let the police investigation run its course and allow them some independent analysis”.

Last week Dutton told Sky News: "I think there was concern about why the boy was being led, or for what purpose he was being led, away back into the regional processing centre. I think it's fair to say that the mood had elevated quite quickly. I think some of the local residents were quite angry about this particular incident and another alleged sexual assault," he said.

Yapu told Guardian Australia last Friday the events leading up to the shooting on Manus, where armed men stormed the compound, and the incident involving the child, were entirely separate incidents.

"It's a total separate incident altogether," Yapu said. "The incident that transpired on Friday was because a duty soldier was being assaulted by one of the asylum seekers or refugees."

Yapu said a young boy had gone to the centre to ask for food about two weeks ago, but he was not led there and was 10, not five, as Dutton had suggested. He said the boy's parents had not made a complaint, and police were not investigating any link between his visit and the shooting.

Dutton was asked on Sunday whether, given the police chief's account, he now accepted he had got some of the information he shared last week badly wrong. "No, I do not," he said.

The immigration minister insisted on Sunday the incident involving the child, and a separate sexual assault, contributed to elevating the "mood" on Manus Island before the violence. "I have that on very good authority on the island," he said. "The parents of the boy involved in the incident might have a different view to the one that you have read off tweets."

Dutton said his comments last week on Sky News "didn't put any blame anywhere". "I was asked a question as to why the mood was elevated, I've answered that question honestly and on advice."

The Greens have also blasted the minister's intervention, and have called for Dutton to exit the portfolio. Greens immigration spokesman Nick McKim said the minister's position was now untenable.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/24/labor-demands-peter-dutton-apologise-for-outrageous-comments-on-manus-violence>

14. Manus Island police chief says he has not been contacted by Peter Dutton or his staff

David Yapu says Australian immigration minister's comments are incorrect and are escalating tensions on the island

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Tuesday 25 April 2017 14.20 AEST

Neither Peter Dutton or his staff have called the top police officer on Manus Island to confirm claims asylum seekers sought to lead a five-year-old local boy to the centre, and that the incident sparked the Good Friday shooting.

The Manus provincial police commander, David Yapu, has stood by his earlier reports, again telling Guardian Australia that Dutton's comments are incorrect and adding that they are escalating tension on the island.

He also said police are not investigating the incident, in further direct contradiction to Dutton's claims.

Asked if anyone from the minister's office had called him to ask about the incident, Yapu replied: "Nobody has rung me to get confirmation or clarification on that issue."

On Good Friday a group of armed soldiers and locals shot at the regional processing centre, forcing asylum seekers, refugees and staff members to cower in rooms or flee into nearby jungle.

Despite statements from the PNG navy and police blaming the shooting on a football field incident that escalated, Dutton publicly suggested the hostilities were sparked by three asylum seekers seen leading a five-year-old boy towards the detention centre.

"I think there was concern about why the boy was being led, or for what purpose he was being led, away back into the regional processing centre," he told Sky News, more than a week after the shooting.

Yapu responded they were two entirely separate events and that Dutton's details were wrong. Dutton then told the ABC he had information others didn't "from senior people on the island".

He refused to say what that information was or where it came from and later called on media outlets to apologise for their reporting.

“The police are investigating the incident around the five-year-old boy?” he was asked on Insiders.

“Yes they are,” Dutton replied.

On Tuesday Yapu told Guardian Australia there has been no complaint made by the parents of the young boy in question and police were not investigating.

“He’s a state minister, I don’t know his views about the issue but from me as the [provincial police commander], there is no complaint being made by the parents of the boy,” Yapu said.

“If it was an issue the parents of the boy should have reported to police so the police can carry out their normal investigations. But that is a very low-profile case and it’s unwarranted for the police to investigate. We only investigate if there is a complaint made through police.”

Yapu said the situation had returned to normal but comments such as Dutton’s were potentially dangerous, as the community was already experiencing issues of hostility between refugees and asylum seekers and the Manus community.

Both the PNG police force and navy have launched investigations, which Yapu said would be released in due course.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/25/manus-island-police-chief-says-he-has-not-been-contacted-by-peter-dutton-or-his-staff>

15. Peter Dutton demands apology from media over Manus controversy

Immigration ministers says ABC and Fairfax relied on ‘discredited’ witness and he stands by his account of the causes of violence ‘100%’

The Guardian
Gareth Hutchens
Tuesday 25 April 2017 07.14 AEST

Peter Dutton has demanded an apology from the media for their reporting on the origins of a violent disturbance on Manus Island two weeks ago and reiterated his claim that the violence was connected with an incident when, he said, a five-year-old boy was led into the island’s detention centre.

Dutton said the ABC and Fairfax Media, among others, had relied on the testimony of Papua New Guinean politician Ronny Knight, who Dutton said was a discredited witness because he had been dismissed from parliament over corruption findings.

Journalists had “morphed into advocates” and “lost control of any dispassionate view of this circumstance”, he told Sky News on Monday evening. He also criticised Guardian Australia.

Last Thursday Dutton said the violence, in which shots were fired at and around the immigration detention centre on Manus Island, occurred after local people witnessed asylum seekers leading a five-year-old boy towards the centre, implying they intended to sexually assault him.

But the top police officer on Manus, David Yapu, said the event Dutton referred to had nothing to do with the violence – it had occurred two weeks earlier, the boy was in fact 10 and he had gone to the centre to ask for food. Police were not investigating it in relation to the shooting, which Yapu said was caused by drunk soldiers responding to a dispute over the use of a football field.

On the ABC’s Insiders program on Sunday, Dutton dug in behind his controversial comments. But the pressure mounted on Monday, with Labor demanding that Dutton apologise for his “irresponsible and outrageous” commentary and the Greens calling for him to resign. Conservative columnist and broadcaster Andrew Bolt called for Dutton to prove his claim or apologise.

In Monday’s interview with Sky News, Dutton said he stood by his original comments “100%”.

“We have seen allegations and charges in relation to a number of sexual assaults, and the fact remains that a number of males who were within the population on Manus Island were involved in leading a young boy into the detention centre and that matter is being investigated,” he said.

“If somebody from the ABC or from Fairfax or the Guardian or some of these fringe dwellers out in the internet have a different view, a more substantive view, a more informed view, then let them put it on the table.

“But I’ve provided the facts as they’ve been advised to me by my department and those people with knowledge of what’s happened on the ground, and I’m not changing my position, my version, one bit, because the advice that I’ve got I’ve reconfirmed again today.”

Knight had also criticised Dutton's account during an ABC radio interview on Monday and Dutton said his intervention exposed the broadcaster as partisan because Knight had been dismissed from PNG's parliament last week following corruption findings.

Dutton told Sky on Monday: "I think the ABC has lost the plot and they should be out apologising.

"In relation to a lot of the journalists, they've morphed into advocates and they've lost control of any dispassionate view of this circumstance.

"What I said is factual, I stand by it 100%, and I'm not going to be cowed into a different position when I know what I said to be the truth.

"I'll stand by those comments and I expect the ABC and Fairfax and others to be making an apology in the next 24 hours or so given the revelations that have been released tonight in relation to their discredited witness."

Knight was found guilty of misappropriating public funds in 2015 and the country's leadership tribunal had recommended his dismissal from public office, Fairfax reported.

Knight had appealed against that decision but the ruling was upheld on Wednesday – meaning he was technically dismissed from public office last week.

Knight was introduced by ABC host Fran Kelly as a serving MP, and he referred to himself as such during the interview.

Knight criticised Dutton during the interview for making the "ridiculous" claim that he knew more about what was happening on Manus Island than local authorities.

"His comment that he knows more than we do is ridiculous," Knight said in Monday's ABC interview. "I'm on the ground, I'm the MP from here. If he knows more than I do then he must have a really good intelligence organisation and it must be Australian, not Papua New Guinean."

Dutton told Sky: "These people can take the word of somebody that's been discredited but that is an issue frankly for the credibility of the ABC, Fairfax and others, and I think they need to reflect on their position because they've really turned into advocates as opposed to professional journalists."

Guardian Australia had not reported Knight's comments.

In his initial comments last week, Dutton told Sky News: "I think there was concern about why the boy was being led, or for what purpose he was being led, away back into the regional processing centre.

"I think it's fair to say that the mood had elevated quite quickly. I think some of the local residents were quite angry about this particular incident and another alleged sexual assault," he said, while conceding he did not have "full details".

Yapu flatly contradicted his account, saying: "It's a total separate incident altogether."

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/25/peter-dutton-demands-apology-media-manus-controversy>

16. 'Ridiculous': Peter Dutton contradicted for third time over Manus Island brawl explanation

Canberra Times
April 24 2017 - 11:47PM
Michael Koziol

A prominent Papua New Guinea politician has accused Immigration Minister Peter Dutton of being "ridiculous" in suggesting he knew more about violent unrest at the Manus Island detention centre than locals.

Former Manus Island MP Ronny Knight joined other PNG police and defence force officials in stressing the Good Friday violence was unrelated to an incident involving a child being taken into the facility a week earlier.

Mr Dutton has been under fire since Thursday when he claimed, in a television interview, that tensions boiled over due to concerns about a five-year-old boy who was "led into" the Australian-run centre by three asylum seekers.

The minister has been accused of conflating unrelated events to create the impression asylum seekers may have intended to sexually assault the boy.

PNG police have said the boy was 10, not five, and he was simply given fruit at the centre before being escorted out, and left unharmed.

Mr Knight called on Mr Dutton to release CCTV footage or other evidence, after the minister claimed on Sunday to possess information not available to the public and the media.

"His comment that he knows more than we do is ridiculous," Mr Knight told ABC Radio National on Monday.

"I'm on the ground, I'm the MP from here. If he knows more than I do then he must have a really good intelligence organisation and it must be Australian, not PNG."

However, Mr Knight's credibility has been called into question after a court last week upheld a 2015 decision dismissing him from office after he was found guilty of misappropriating funds.

Mr Knight remained in office through the appeal, which was rejected on Wednesday, just a day before writs were issued for PNG's upcoming election. Fairfax Media understands Mr Knight plans to recontest his Manus Island seat.

He referred to himself as an MP in the ABC interview on Monday.

Mr Knight said the Good Friday incident, in which up to 100 shots were fired by PNG soldiers later revealed to be intoxicated, started after an asylum seeker allegedly assaulted a military officer.

"The incident was caused by a uniformed officer being assaulted. It was sparked by a spur of the moment thing that happened," he said.

"If it was a local who did the same thing it would have ended up the same way."

Mr Knight said Australian authorities, who fund and administer the camp, should release the evidence rather than suggesting the matter was in the hands of PNG.

"It's really easy for them to pass the buck and that's what's been happening," he said.

Mr Knight conceded there was tension between some locals and some refugees, who are now able to move freely around the province as a result of the detention centre being declared "open" last year.

Part of the bad will arises from two separate sexual assault charges laid against asylum seekers this year, one involving the alleged rape of a 10-year-old girl. Neither has been convicted, and both contest the charges.

"There definitely is tension there. There is angst in the local society," Mr Knight said. "There's always a dynamic in there which is bad and good - there are the bad ones [asylum seekers], there are the good ones."

Mr Dutton defended his case on Sunday, claiming he had been briefed by "senior people on the island" and repeating that the mood was "elevated" as a result of the previous sexual assault charges and the incident involving the child.

"There are facts that I have that you don't," he told the ABC's Insiders program. "I can give you the facts in relation to it, or you can take the Twitter version."

Mr Dutton's political opponents have seized on the confusion, with Labor's shadow immigration minister Shayne Neumann calling on him to apologise, and Greens immigration spokesman Nick McKim demanding he be sacked.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/ridiculous-peter-dutton-contradicted-for-third-time-over-manus-island-brawl-explanation-20170423-gvqy3c.html>

17. PNG politician critical of Peter Dutton over Manus Island claims was dismissed as MP

Canberra Times
April 25 2017 - 8:18AM
Michael Koziol

A Papua New Guinea politician who criticised Immigration Minister Peter Dutton on the ABC on Monday was actually dismissed from PNG's Parliament last week following corruption findings, Fairfax Media can reveal.

The discovery is a boon for Mr Dutton, who is under siege for his controversial account of the Good Friday rampage on Manus Island, and who is now demanding an apology from the national broadcaster.

Ronny Knight, who represented Manus Island province in the PNG Parliament until last week, was introduced by ABC presenter Fran Kelly as a serving MP and referred to himself as such during the interview.

Mr Knight's comments were reported by numerous other media outlets on Monday, including Fairfax Media.

But reports from three separate PNG media outlets, and confirmed by PNG police, indicate Mr Knight was technically dismissed from office last Wednesday when a court rejected his long-running appeal.

The outspoken former MP was found guilty of misappropriating public funds in 2015 and a tribunal recommended his dismissal from office. Last week a PNG court reportedly upheld that decision. Advertisement

In a complicated twist of timing, the decision was handed down just a day before writs for the PNG election were issued, effectively rendering all MPs out of office until polling day.

It is understood Mr Knight will recontest the seat and again appeal the finding.

The revelation is significant because of the contentious and politically-charged claims surrounding events leading up to the Good Friday altercation between PNG soldiers and asylum seekers at the Australian-run facility on Manus Island.

Mr Knight used Monday's interview to lambast Mr Dutton as "ridiculous" for claiming to possess information not known to the public, the media or authorities on the ground.

"His comment that he knows more than we do is ridiculous," he said.

"I'm on the ground, I'm the MP from here. If he knows more than I do then he must have a really good intelligence organisation and it must be Australian, not PNG."

Manus province police commander David Yapu, who has also publicly contradicted Mr Dutton's account of the Good Friday rampage, confirmed Mr Knight had been removed from office last week following the court decision.

The PNG Post-Courier quoted Mr Knight saying last week that he would "seek a permanent stay order on the findings".

An ABC spokesman acknowledged that "according to reports", the PNG National Court confirmed Mr Knight's dismissal last week, but noted: "Mr Knight is appealing this decision and is still listed on the PNG Parliamentary website as a Member of Parliament".

While the revelation does not invalidate Mr Knight's observations about the Manus Island incident, which took place while he was still in office, it will discredit his evidence in what has become a dramatic war-of-words between Mr Dutton and PNG officials.

The minister has been under siege for his claims, made in a television interview last week, that last week's altercation may have been prompted when asylum seekers "led" a five-year-old boy into the detention centre.

Reports of Mr Knight's interview prompted conservative commentator Andrew Bolt to weigh in on Monday, declaring of Mr Dutton's thesis: "It was an ugly suggestion, and it is now time he proved it or apologised".

Mr Dutton declined to comment for this story, but on Sky News on Monday night accused the ABC of having "lost the plot" for relying on the word of "people that have been convicted of fraud and have been excluded from Parliament".

"They're taking their word over the word of the Australian government," Mr Dutton said. "I frankly think the ABC has lost the plot and I think they should be out apologising."

Mr Knight did not respond to a request for comment.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/png-politician-critical-of-peter-dutton-over-manus-island-claims-was-dismissed-as-mp-20170424-qvreb.html>

18. Manus Island controversy: who said what and when

Papua New Guinea police dispute a claim by Australia's immigration minister, Peter Dutton, that a mob attack on asylum seekers was sparked after a five-year-old boy was led to the detention centre

The Guardian
Paul Karp
Tuesday 25 April 2017 14.21 AEST

On 14 April shots were fired at and around the Manus Island detention centre. An armed mob, including members of the Papua New Guinea defence forces, tried to storm the centre, causing detainees and staff to hide or flee. The events that led to the violence have been hotly disputed, with accounts by the local police chief and the Australian immigration minister, Peter Dutton, directly contradicting each other.

Here is how the controversy unfolded:

• • **Friday 14 April**

On Good Friday at around 6.30pm a large group of local men, including some personnel from the naval base, attempt to break into the Manus Island detention centre to attack refugees and asylum seekers. Live rounds are fired into the compounds of the detention centre, as refugees and asylum seekers cower inside.

• • **Tuesday 18 April**

The regional police commander on Manus, David Yapu, blames the “nasty” incident on drunken PNG defence force personnel.

The PNG defence force said the incident was triggered by an altercation on a football field when asylum seekers refused to leave the ground as directed, and escalated after an officer was assaulted. Detainees denied the claim.

Yapu said the soldiers engaged in “unethical and unacceptable behaviour”, shooting at the centre and assaulting staff and asylum seekers in retaliation for the alleged assault.

• • **Thursday 20 April**

Peter Dutton comments on the incident for the first time, telling Sky News locals had been “quite angry” that three asylum seekers were seen leading a five-year old boy towards the detention centre.

“I think there was concern about why the boy was being led, or for what purpose he was being led, away back into the regional processing centre,” Dutton said.

“I think it’s fair to say that the mood had elevated quite quickly. I think some of the local residents were quite angry about this particular incident and another alleged sexual assault.”

Dutton’s account, inconsistent with the PNG police’s version, is immediately contradicted by Behrouz Boochani, an Iranian journalist and Kurdish refugee held on Manus, who essentially corroborates Yapu’s statement that the shooting was sparked after a fight when naval personnel asked a group of refugees to leave the football field.

• • **Friday 21 April**

Yapu explicitly contradicts Dutton’s account, saying his comments on the boy referred to a “total separate incident altogether”.

Yapu says the young boy had gone to the centre to ask for food about two weeks earlier, but he was not led there and he was 10, not five. The boy’s parents had not made a complaint, and police were not investigating any link between his visit and the shooting.

Detainees say they had told the boy to stay at the doorway while they gathered some food. They call on Dutton to release CCTV footage to confirm their account.

The Greens immigration spokesman, Nick McKim, says Dutton has been caught telling an “outrageous lie” and should either “resign or be sacked”.

• • **Sunday 23 April**

Dutton refuses to back down from his account in an interview on the ABC’s Insiders, saying the account was “true” and suggesting he had different advice to Yapu.

Asked if he accepted he had got any element of the story wrong, the minister replied: “No, I do not.”

Dutton continues to insist the incident involving the child, and a separate sexual assault, contributed to elevating the “mood” on Manus Island before the violence.

“I have that on very good authority on the island,” he says. “The parents of the boy involved in the incident might have a different view to the one that you have read off tweets.”

Dutton says he is in possession of advice “that you don’t [have], so why don’t we let the police investigation run its course and allow them some independent analysis”.

“There are facts that I have that you don’t ... I can give you the facts in relation to it, or you can take the Twitter version.”

Interviewer Barrie Cassidy ask directly: “The police are investigating the incident around the five-year-old boy?”

Dutton: "Yes they are."

Labor's immigration spokesman, Shayne Neumann, demands Dutton apologise for his "irresponsible and outrageous" commentary.

• • **Monday 24 April**

Former Manus Island MP Ronny Knight joins those who contradicted Dutton by saying the incident with the boy had nothing to do with the mob attack.

"[Dutton's] comment that he knows more than we do is ridiculous," Knight tells ABC Radio National. "I'm on the ground, I'm the MP from here. If he knows more than I do then he must have a really good intelligence organisation and it must be Australian, not PNG."

Knight refers to himself as an MP and is introduced as such by the presenter, Fran Kelly, but a court last week reportedly upheld a 2015 decision dismissing him from office after he was found guilty of misappropriating funds.

A report in Fairfax Media, since amended, quoted Knight's comments on the ABC and also referred to him as an MP. A later report said Knight was disqualified just a day before writs for the PNG election were issued, effectively rendering all MPs out of office until polling day. Knight will recontest the seat and again appeal against the finding.

Dutton demands an apology from the media for its coverage, telling Sky News the ABC had "lost the plot".

"What I said is factual, I stand by it 100%, and I'm not going to be cowed into a different position when I know what I said to be the truth.

"I'll stand by those comments and I expect the ABC and Fairfax and others to be making an apology in the next 24 hours or so given the revelations that have been released tonight in relation to their discredited witness."

Dutton says "the fact remains" that a number of men at the detention centre "were involved in leading a young boy into the detention centre and that matter is being investigated".

The immigration minister challenges the ABC, Fairfax, the Guardian "or some of these fringe dwellers out in the internet" to put a different view on the table, if they have one.

"I've provided the facts as they've been advised to me by my department and those people with knowledge of what's happened on the ground, and I'm not changing my position, my version, one bit, because the advice that I've got I've reconfirmed again today," Dutton says.

• • **Tuesday 25 April**

Yapu tells Guardian Australia the police are not investigating the allegation about the boy because there has been no complaint. He also says no one from Dutton's office has contacted him. "Nobody has rung me to get confirmation or clarification on that issue." He says Dutton's comments are adding to community tension and "it's making it more dangerous".

Guardian Australia has contacted Dutton numerous times to ask for the facts or advice he had relied on, but has been told no more information would be made public "at this time". Dutton has declined to release the information he says backs his account to any other media.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/25/manus-island-controversy-who-said-what-and-when>

19. Peter Dutton says his claims about Manus violence came from 'classified information'

After his version of events was disputed by the Manus police chief, the Australian immigration minister says he won't release evidence for his claims

The Guardian

Katharine Murphy Political editor

Wednesday 26 April 2017 06.19 AEST Last modified on Wednesday 26 April 2017 06.26 AEST

Peter Dutton, the immigration minister, says he won't release additional material clarifying the causes of violence on Manus Island two weeks ago because his briefings are classified or confidential.

Pressed to explain inconsistencies between his version of events, and a contradictory account given by the top police officer on Manus Island, Dutton told Sky News on Tuesday night he was not going to release his ministerial briefings publicly.

"I receive confidential briefings, I receive classified information from the commissioner of the Australian Border Force and the department, and I am not going to release that information publicly," Dutton said. "There is an investigation under way."

The navy and police in Papua New Guinea have blamed a shooting on the island two weeks ago on a football field incident that escalated, but Dutton has suggested the hostilities were sparked by three asylum seekers seen leading a five-year-old boy towards the detention centre.

Dutton told Sky News last week: "I think there was concern about why the boy was being led, or for what purpose he was being led, away back into the regional processing centre."

David Yapu, the Manus provincial police commander, has contradicted that account, saying the violence at the compound a fortnight ago, and the incident involving the child, were two separate incidents.

Dutton told the ABC at the weekend he stood by his own account of the incident, which he said was based on advice.

The minister said the account he had given of the incident was "true" and he suggested he had different information to the regional police commander.

Dutton said on Sunday he was in possession of advice "that you don't [have], so why don't we let the police investigation run its course and allow them some independent analysis".

Asked on Sky News on Tuesday night to specify his different information, Dutton said briefings were confidential, and an investigation would take its course.

The minister said he did not resile from his account of events "one bit" and he continued to insist the violence was the result of a build up in tensions which had been "on a slow boil for a period of time".

"My position hasn't changed. My story hasn't changed."

Labor has demanded that Dutton apologise. "Peter Dutton's comments are irresponsible and outrageous," the shadow immigration spokesman, Shayne Neumann said over the weekend. "They pre-empt the findings of a PNG investigation and have been denied by authorities on the ground. Peter Dutton should know better and immediately apologise."

The Greens have also blasted the minister's intervention, and have called for Dutton to exit the portfolio. Greens immigration spokesman Nick McKim has said the minister's position is untenable.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/26/peter-dutton-says-his-claims-about-manus-violence-came-from-classified-information>

20. 'All we did was help a poor, hungry child': Refugees hit back at Peter Dutton

Canberra Times

April 26 2017 - 5:42PM

Michael Gordon

The three refugees accused by Peter Dutton of triggering the Good Friday rampage by PNG soldiers at the Manus Island detention centre have emphatically denied any wrongdoing in a signed statement.

In a formal complaint against what they claim is the Immigration Minister's "false accusation", the three have requested CCTV footage of them taking a local boy into the centre be released.

"We didn't do anything wrong except helping a poor boy," the three write in the complaint, lodged with Wilson Security and Australian Border Force and seen by Fairfax Media. "We need investigation ASAP."

Mr Dutton has suggested the trio intended to sexually assault the boy and maintains the incident created angst and elevated tensions among locals who live and work on the Navy base that surrounds the detention centre.

The provincial police commander, David Yapu, and local politician, Ron Knight, insist the incident had nothing to do with the rampage, which they maintain followed an altercation between asylum seekers and soldiers on the base soccer pitch.

Around 100 shots were fired during the rampage, with many hitting the accommodation blocks where asylum seekers sought cover. Mr Yapu says drunken soldiers indiscriminately assaulted policemen, PNG immigration officers, other service providers and asylum seekers.

A defiant Mr Dutton says he stands by his initial comments and accuses the ABC and Fairfax Media of relying on the word of Mr Knight, who he says has been convicted of fraud and excluded from PNG's Parliament.

Mr Knight on Wednesday won a stay on the order denying him his seat in Parliament and vehemently denies any misappropriation of public funds. He intends to re-nominate for the Manus Island seat on Thursday.

In their complaint, seen by Fairfax Media, the three asylum seekers say they assisted a "hungry and poor child" who was requesting food or money outside the centre more than a week before the rampage. Fairfax Media has agreed not to name the refugees, who are identified by their numbers in their statement. Two are from Afghanistan, one from Pakistan.

"He was fluent in English and begging for food. We had no money with us," they say. "We told him we have fruits inside the centre and he requested to come and get fruit.

"He walked with us through gate 18 toward Oscar One (compound). While passing Oscar main gate, local security asked us what he is doing here."

They say they responded that they were going to give fruit to the boy and were allowed to take him into the centre by a local guard.

The boy was then asked to sit on a chair outside the number one tent in the compound while one of the asylum seekers went inside and filled two plastic bags with fruit.

"A couple of officers also gave him fruits, biscuits, etc," they say, before security came and escorted the boy from the centre.

"All these incidents are recorded by your CCTV cameras. We are requesting for the immediate release of the footage of this incident."

The statement is consistent with the police version, in which Mr Yapu says the incident involving the boy, who was 10, was "low profile", and no complaint was lodged by the boy's parents.

On Tuesday night, Mr Dutton did not back down from his earlier claims.

"As you'd expect I receive confidential briefings, I receive classified information from the commissioner of Australian Border Force, from my department and I'm not going to release that information publicly," he told Sky News.

"The reality is that the tension has been building up and people who believe that an incident on the soccer field was the sole incident that sparked the response that we saw from the PNG naval officer allegedly firing shots is a nonsense."

"I've received briefings over a period of time as you would expect and there have been a number of incidents in relation to allegations around sexual assault."

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/all-we-did-was-help-poor-hungry-child-asylum-seekers-hit-back-at-peter-dutton-20170426-gvsyr5.html>

21. Greens senator Nick McKim to investigate detention centre shooting during Manus Island visit

ABC News Online

By political reporters Henry Belot and Stephen Dziedzic

Wednesday April 26, 2017

Greens senator Nick McKim will use a trip to Manus Island next week to "get to the bottom" of what sparked a shooting at the Manus Island detention centre on Good Friday.

Explanations of the shooting have been conflicting and contradictory with Mr Dutton saying it is "indisputable" that shots were fired by soldiers concerned about the welfare of a young boy.

But Manus Island police commander David Yapu said the boy was not related to the shooting and there were no concerns for his welfare and no official complaint.

Mr Yapu instead blamed the shooting on drunken soldiers at the nearby naval base, who allegedly had a fight with refugees playing soccer.

Senator McKim said he would discuss the shooting with Papua New Guinea police while visiting Manus Island.

"I've put in requests to meet with senior Papua New Guinean police both in Port Moresby and on Manus Island because, given Peter Dutton's comments about how the Good Friday attacks occurred and why they occurred, I want to help Australians understand what happened," he said.

"I haven't signed up to any conditions, either with the Papua New Guinean Government or the Australian Government.

"Now we're told consistently that the detention centre is an open centre so it's my intention to simply go to the centre."

Mr Dutton said the suggestion a PNG navy officer fired bullets into the detention centre because of a fight about soccer alone was a "nonsense".

"There was a build-up for a period of time, and I think it was on a slow boil for a period of time, and I think it boiled over in relation to that particular incident," he told Sky News.

Mr Dutton said there had been numerous allegations about sexual assault at the detention centre, which is part of a PNG naval base and adjacent to the local community.

"It is quite integrated and there have been circumstances that have caused us concern and that's been consistent in terms of the briefings that I have received," he said.

The minister said he had received "clear and consistent" advice that the shooting was "not an issue that just boiled up with one incident on a soccer field".

"There was — certainly the case in terms of all the information I have received — advice about certain behaviours that concern me, concern me greatly," Mr Dutton told Sky News.

"I have been very adamant in relation to the stance that I have taken and I don't resile from that one bit."

Mr Dutton has called on a number of media outlets, including the ABC and Fairfax Media, to apologise for their reporting of the shooting.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-26/greens-senator-to-ask-png-police-about-manus-island-shooting/8471762>

22. Manus refugees who fed child lodge complaint about Dutton's 'false allegations'

Three men call on Australian Border Force to release CCTV footage which they say will exonerate them of allegations their assistance created 'angst'

The Guardian
Ben Doherty and Helen Davidson
Thursday 27 April 2017 12.03 AEST

Three refugees who gave a hungry child fruit inside the Manus Island detention centre have hit back at suggestions of wrongdoing, lodging a formal complaint with the Australian Border Force over "false allegations", along with a plea to release the CCTV footage which they say will exonerate them.

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, said the men's assistance of the boy inside the detention centre created "a lot of angst" on Manus, and alleged it was the trigger the Good Friday shooting rampage by Papua New Guinea defence force personnel on the centre, despite it occurring five days before the riot.

Police on Manus and the PNG defence force have repudiated the minister's allegations, saying the rampage – which involved more than 100 shots being fired into the detention centre and a defence force vehicle ramming a gate – was sparked by a fight over a soccer pitch on Good Friday afternoon. The boy's presence inside the centre was unrelated, police said, and attracted "no complaint".

The Guardian has confirmed with ABF staff that all three men who helped the boy have been recognised as refugees – that is they have a well-founded fear of persecution in their homeland and are legally owed protection.

The three men, who the Guardian has chosen not to name, have signed a handwritten statement detailing their interaction with the boy, all of which was done with the permission of detention centre security guards, and took place in public spaces, observed by CCTV cameras.

Dutton has reportedly viewed the CCTV footage, but has refused to release it publicly, saying it was confidential. However, reports of the footage's content corroborate the men's account.

The men have lodged a formal complaint with Wilson Security, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, and PNG immigration authorities:

"We ... have [a] complaint about false accusation which is made upon us by minister for immigration Peter Dutton.

"We helped a hungry and poor child who was requesting for food or money. He was fluent in English and begging for food.

“We had no money with us. We told him we have fruits inside the centre and he requested to come and get fruit.

“He walked with us through Gate 18 toward Oscar One (1). While passing Oscar main gate local security in the gate asked us ‘what is he doing here?’ We are responded (sic), ‘we are going to give fruit to him’ and we entered Oscar compound. Local security said ‘it’s okay.”

One of the men continues in the statement:

“I asked the boy to sit on a chair outside Oscar One, 1, and I went inside to get fruits for him, couple others also gave him fruits, biscuits, etc. It was couple plastic bags of fruit. Security came and escorted the boy outside the centre.

“All of these incidents is recorded by your CCTV cameras. We are requesting for the immediate release of the footage of this incident. We didn’t do any wrong except helping a poor boy. We need investigation ASAP.”

Dutton said the incident led to heightened tensions between Manusians and the refugee population on Manus Island. This has been contradicted by the PNG police and defence forces who say it is unrelated.

PNG police said in a statement that “a group of drunken soldiers” had “rampaged” through the detention centre, “firing several shots into the air and indiscriminately assaulting policemen, PNG immigration officers, other service providers and asylum seekers”.

A statement from the PNG defence force alleged an officer was assaulted by an asylum seeker “which led to an escalation of the confrontation”.

“Rocks were allegedly thrown by asylum seekers and shots fired by the members of the naval base,” the statement read.

“[A] few people [were] treated for minor injuries.”

The Manus provincial police commander David Yapu said no one from the minister’s office had called him to ask him about the incident, or whether police were investigating the boy’s presence in the centre. He said police were not investigating.

Dutton has reportedly seen the CCTV footage, but has refused to release it publicly, saying it was confidential. He told the ABC “I have facts you don’t have,” but did not elaborate on what they were.

News Corp Australia and Sky News commentator Andrew Bolt reported he has been briefed on the footage. His account of what it shows accords with the men’s version of events.

Requests from the Guardian for access to the CCTV footage have not been granted, as have requests to interview the Australian Border Force commissioner, Roman Quaedvlieg. The ABF has ultimate authority over the Manus Island detention centre.

Tensions between refugees and Manusians on the island have been significantly raised since the partial opening of the detention centre. This folloed a ruling by the PNG supreme court a year ago that the detention centre’s operation was “illegal and unconstitutional”.

Refugees are not free to leave the detention centre of their own volition, but can take scheduled buses to Lorengau township. They cannot leave Manus, and the detention centre, still behind three-metre steel fences, remains a secure area.

But the increased interaction has led to hostility. Two refugees have been charged with sexual assault – one of a local woman and another of an underage girl. Both deny the charges. Several refugees have also been attacked by locals, including two refugees who were assaulted by a large group of Manusians, who hit them repeatedly with an iron bar.

The Manus MP Ronny Knight, who was disqualified from holding his seat before being reinstated by the supreme court this week, has consistently warned of potential violence between Manusians and refugees.

The PNG government has given the Australian government until 31 October to close the detention centre. The US has said it will uphold an agreement to resettle up to 1,250 refugees from Australia’s offshore detention islands, but the Australian government concedes a “balance” will be left on Manus Island and Nauru.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/apr/27/manus-refugees-who-fed-child-lodge-complaint-about-duttons-false-allegations>

23. Manus Island detainee who brought young boy into detention centre says he only gave him food

ABC Radio CAF - AM

By Papua New Guinea correspondent Eric Tlozek

Friday April 28, 11:29am

The Afghan refugee who brought a small boy into the Manus Island detention centre a few weeks ago has said he and friends only gave the child some food. The man said he was confused and upset by allegations from Australia's Immigration Minister Peter Dutton that local people suspected him of sexual assault. "I grew up in a country that was war and bombs and fighting and all these things and I was raised without my father," he said. "I experienced hunger, I experienced being thirsty, I experienced poverty and I know how it feels for a child to be hungry. "And when I see that I cannot just close my eyes and not help."

The 34-year-old — who asked for his name to be withheld — said he was returning from playing soccer when the boy approached him and his friends and asked for food or money. "I told him 'I have food and fruit inside the centre, would you like to come?' and he said 'yes, I would like to go with you and get the fruit'," he said.

The refugee said he and his friends then walked with the boy through a staffed security gate into the centre.

"Local security asked us: 'What is he doing here?' I responded that he needs food and fruit, we are going to give him food and fruit," he said. "Officers let us go through and we entered Oscar compound."

The refugee said the boy sat outside the living quarters while he and other men packed food for him, then security guards took the child back outside the centre.

His actions have become the subject of contention in Australia, with Mr Dutton suggesting they led to an increase in tension between detainees and the local community that contributed to a subsequent attack on the detention centre by Papua New Guinea Defence Force personnel on Good Friday.

But the Afghan refugee said the gesture was days before the attack, and was well received by the child and by the local guards. "It's a shame for Peter Dutton to say that," he said. "The action I did for this child was a favour. In other countries is it a shame to help a poor child? In my country it's respected and we all do this."

Mr Dutton said bringing the boy inside the centre caused "angst" amongst the local community and contributed to the attack on the detention centre. He linked it to recent allegations of sexual assault on Manus Island, including while speaking to radio station 2GB on April 27.

"We have seen reports, we are concerned about some allegations of sexual behaviour by the asylum seekers toward girls and women on Manus," Mr Dutton said. "So I was very clear in what I've said and I stand by it 100 per cent. I haven't deviated from it at all and I won't because I know what I've said to be factually true. So that's the reality."

The Afghan refugee said he was horrified his actions had been associated with sexual assault. "I can't sleep, I can't eat, I didn't commit any crime, it's driving me crazy," he said.

Police on Manus Island said they were not investigating the incident with the boy, because his parents did not make a complaint and there was no concern for his welfare. Manus Province police commander David Yapu has also told the ABC the incident is unrelated to the attack on the centre.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-28/manus-island-detainee-who-brought-boy-to-detention-centre-speaks/8478020>

24. Peter Dutton's refugee comments could raise Manus tensions: police chief

Canberra Times

April 28 2017

Michael Gordon

PNG police commander David Yapu has expressed concern that Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has raised tensions on Manus Island with his comments about the behaviour of three refugees towards a young boy.

Inspector Yapu has also rejected claims by Border Force Commissioner Roman Quaedvlieg that police were investigating the incident involving the boy and had sought witness statements and CCTV footage.

He told Fairfax Media police were only investigating the behaviour of military personnel who embarked on a violent rampage at the Manus Island detention centre on Good Friday.

"This is not in regard to the boy issue. The statements and the footage were provided to police only on the incident that happened on April 14," Inspector Yapu said.

While police and witnesses say the Good Friday violence followed an altercation between detainees and military personnel on a soccer field, Mr Dutton maintains the incident with the boy "caused a lot of angst" and "elevated the tempo on the ground".

The provincial police commander said Mr Dutton's comments about the boy were making it harder for police to restore calm to the area within a navy base that surrounds the detention centre, where inmates are permitted to leave during daylight hours.

"After the recent [Good Friday] incident, we are trying to monitor the situation and get back the confidence [of the community and detainees] and get back to normalcy at the centre," he said.

"This kind of thing can trigger an escalation. This is my fear."

Mr Dutton has refused to retreat from his claims that the incident in which a boy was taken into the centre by three refugees elevated the mood on Manus and served as a catalyst for the violence.

While Mr Dutton initially said local residents were angry over this incident and "another alleged sexual assault", he has since spoken of "a series of events".

"We are concerned about some allegations of sexual behaviour by the asylum seekers toward girls and women on Manus," he said on Thursday.

The three refugees have filed a formal complaint over Mr Dutton's comments, insisting they took a poor boy into the centre with the permission of a guard and gave him a bag of fruit after he approached them asking for money or food.

"I grew up in a country that had war and bombs and fighting and all of these things and I was raised without a father," one of the refugees who took the boy into the centre told ABC radio on Friday.

"I experienced hunger, I experienced being thirsty, I experienced poverty, and I know how it feels for a child to be hungry, and when I see that I cannot just close my eyes and not help."

Inspector Yapu has dismissed the incident with the boy as a "dead issue", saying there has been no report to police or complaint from the boy's parents.

"I really don't understand why people are making an issue out of that. It's a very small thing and they are making a great issue out of it."

When the inspector's comments were put to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, a spokesperson responded: "The department is aware that the incident in which a young child was found in the Manus regional processing centre has been referred to the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary.

"As such, it is not appropriate for us to comment further at this time. We refer you to the minister's [Mr Dutton's] public statements on this matter."

Inspector Yapu said witness statements and footage gathered by police related only to the events of Good Friday. He has also defended the conduct of the asylum seekers and refugees who visit the province's only town, East Lorengau.

"I'm on the ground," he said. "I've been observing them. I've been monitoring them. They come freely to town, conduct their business, get on to the bus and go back to the centre. They're safe.

"We have no personal grudges with them. The community don't mind seeing them because they mind their own business."

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/peter-duttons-refugee-comments-could-raise-manus-tensions-police-chief-20170428-gvuutj.html>

25. Martin McKenzie-Murray: What happened on Manus Island

Peter Dutton's reckless characterisation of the cause of gunfire on the Manus Island camp only serves to inflame tensions. By Martin McKenzie-Murray..

The Saturday Paper
Martin McKenzie-Murray
ISSUE #154 APRIL 29 – MAY 5, 2017

The Manus camp, which the Australian government conceived, funds and staffs – yet for which it claims to have little responsibility – came under automatic weapons fire from drunk soldiers on Good Friday. Cowering detainees lay flat on their stomachs while bullets pierced their rooms, as Australian lawyers fled into the jungle. Some Wilson Security staff confronted the armed men as they demanded access to the camp. It seems the soldiers' intentions were not murderous, but their actions were, naturally, dangerous and traumatising. Arguably, it was also predictable: the camp is deplored by many locals, the feeling seemingly mutual, and the site has been fatally breached before.

About this extraordinary situation, Australia's immigration minister said nothing publicly for six days. Nothing. Now imagine if Australian aid workers had come under fire in Timor-Leste, say. It is inconceivable that the foreign minister would not provide immediate briefings about the situation and the wellbeing of the Australians. But not in this portfolio.

Peter Dutton's long silence was broken not with a detailed briefing on the situation, but with the insinuation that some of the camp's refugees were child molesters. It was this fact, Dutton suggested, referring to a recent incident when a local boy was escorted into the camp by male detainees, that fomented the angst of the soldiers. "I think there was concern about why the boy was being led, or for what purpose he was being led, away back into the regional processing centre," he said. "I think it's fair to say that the mood had elevated quite quickly. I think some of the local residents were quite angry about this particular incident and another alleged sexual assault."

There is much to be said about Dutton's comments. When he first made them, almost a week after the shootings, I assumed persuasive intelligence had been received by the minister. He still says this is the case. Despite official contradictions, Dutton argues he has confidential information that the media – and apparently the Papua New Guinean police – do not possess.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/immigration/2017/04/29/what-happened-manus-island/14933880004567>